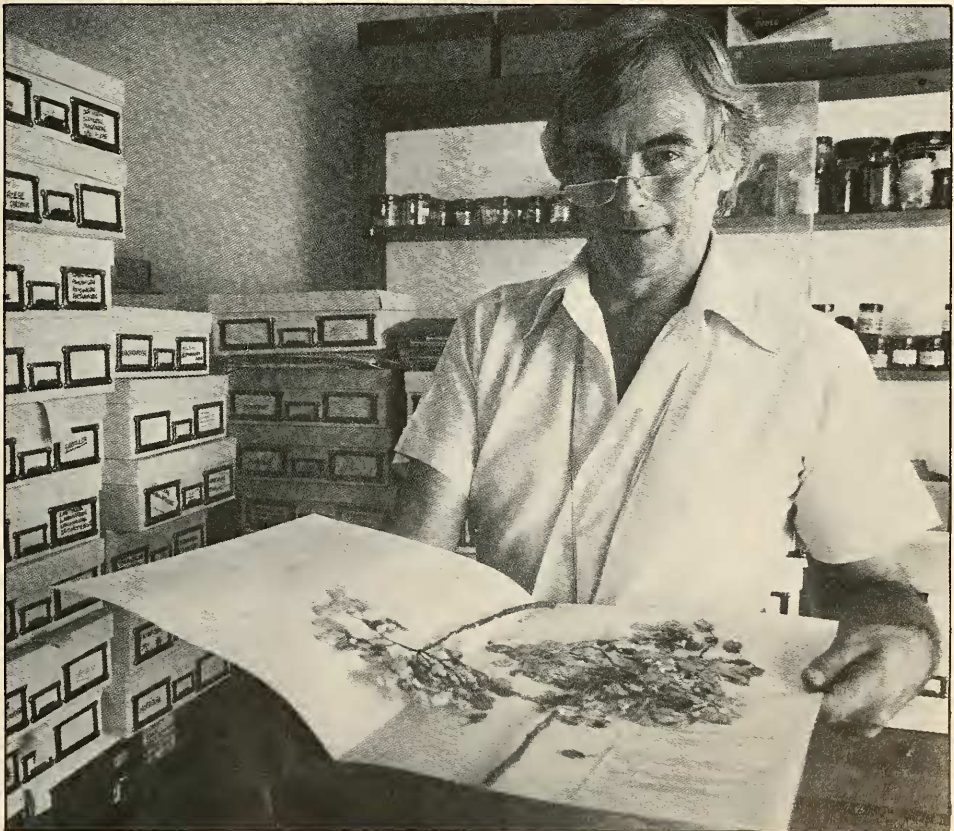


John Teast Waterhouse 1924-1983

(Memorial Series No. 27)

Members were greatly saddened by the sudden death of Mr John T. Waterhouse at his home in Gordon, Sydney, on the night of April 1, 1983, aged 58 years.

Born on December 2nd, 1924, he received his secondary education at Tamworth Boys High School and then attended the University of Sydney, where he obtained a Bachelor of Science with First Class Honours in Botany in April, 1947. During his honours year, which was supervised by the late Dr J. McLuckie, he carried out 'A physiological investigation of the fungus, *Penicillium expansum* Link.' During the next three years he held positions as demonstrator and teaching fellow in Botany at Sydney University. In 1948 Dr A. J. Eames spent a period of leave in Sydney, and he was instrumental in directing John towards his life-long interest in arborescent monocotyledons. In 1950, however, John left the university for life on a property which he always referred to as 'The Blue Duck', a corruption of its aboriginal name, because of the problems he faced with wild ducks following introduction of irrigation for the production of lucerne. It was partly because of these problems that he returned to the University of Sydney in 1953 as a temporary lecturer in Botany, but at the end of 1954 he again opted for life on the land, this time on a grazing property, 'Burrigillo', in the Collarenebri area. Throughout his time on the land he maintained and developed his



knowledge of the native flora, and started compiling a checklist for the area. It is hoped to publish this in the near future. In 1957 John was seriously injured in a fall from a horse while yarding stock, and this resulted in some lengthy periods in hospital over subsequent years. He left the rural life he loved at the start of 1962 and joined the staff of the Department of Botany at the University of New South Wales, as a Senior Tutor, just before the department moved to the Kensington Campus. Shortly after joining the department he was appointed a lecturer. He resumed his studies on Australian Grass Trees, and in 1967 presented a thesis entitled, 'Some aspects of the status of the family Xanthorrhoeaceae', for which he was awarded a Master of Science by the University of New South Wales.

In 1971-72 he spent his first study leave with Professor V. H. Heywood in the Department of Botany, University of Reading, during which he carried out a study on the tribe Anthemideae (Asteraceae), and obtained a Master of Science in Pure and Applied Taxonomy.

John joined the Linnean Society of New South Wales in 1947. He was elected to the Council of the Society in August, 1975, and remained an active and valued member until his death. He was President in 1978-1979, at a time of considerable controversy over the accumulating debt on Science House, and chaired several torrid meetings with great skill. He also devoted a great deal of time to researching the complexities of the issues, and went out of his way to inform members. He continued to make a large contribution to the solution of problems faced by the Society in his term as Vice President, 1979-1982.

In his years at the University of New South Wales John had a great impact on the teaching of botany, and was particularly active in promoting field work. He was responsible for raising taxonomy in the undergraduate syllabus above the level of plant identification, developing at first a part unit and later a full unit in the third year on the principles and methods of taxonomy. He also made a large contribution to teaching at first and second year levels. He organized the day excursion to Kurnell for First Year Biology students until the pressure of numbers made the logistics of the occasion intolerable: the last excursion involved 13 double-decker buses loaded to the gunwales. He was a mainstay of the annual second-year field camp which was held at Mount Boss State Forest from 1966 until that too outgrew the facilities. He also conducted a third year field camp in the same area for his taxonomy students for many years. John's field camps were always a happy combination of efficiently organized work by day and relaxed socialization around the fire at night, always with a few interesting specimens in his hand, and books and a plant press at his elbow. He felt that field work should be enjoyable. The combination of his quiet, easy manner and critical mind sharpened the wits of a large number of students, and stimulated many to take a deeper interest in botany. John also considered that preparation of food should receive proper attention; his third year camps were an object lesson on just what gourmet delights could be produced over an open fire, and word soon spread through the student grape vine.

Two of his research projects had their origins in student exercises on these field camps. The study of the growth of the Bangalow Palm (*Archontophoenix cunninghamiana*) was initiated on the 1967 second year camp, while his work, in collaboration with Dr M. M. Hindmarsh, on a field key to the rainforest species south of the Macleay River grew out of their key to the species of the Wilson River Primitive Area, which was tested and upgraded with the assistance of successive groups of second year students. The final key, which is based on personal examination of fresh specimens of all species, and uses characters of petiole anatomy and exudate, as well as the more usual range of vegetative characters, is now being completed by Dr Hindmarsh. It should prove a valuable aid to identification in these complex communities.

Another of his research interests centred on the Myrtaceae. Apart from his work with Dr P. G. Wilson on *Tristania* and its allies, he also studied *Eucalyptus* and the *Syzygium-Acmena* complex, and drew attention to the distinctiveness of *Syzygium floribundum*. Only the week before he died he saw 'Waterhousea', the name for the segregate genus Hyland (1984) erected to hold this and two Queensland species, in print in the new Royal Botanic Gardens' pamphlet entitled 'A Rainforest Walk'. It is typical of him that he should protest with a grin that the name had not then been published.

During his field work, John assembled a large body of data on the eucalypts, particularly relating to venation patterns, oil gland size and distribution, and bud and capsule morphology. Although this is preserved on cards, it seems unlikely that it will ever be put to use in the construction of a key as he had envisaged.

In 1980, he embarked upon an intensive floristic survey of the Magela Creek Catchment, Northern Territory, in relation to the projected establishment of the Jabiluka uranium mine by Pancontinental Mining Ltd. He studied the area throughout the full monsoonal cycle, amassing a large collection and a wide range of field observations. Although he had produced a draft species list (Puttock and Waterhouse, 1981), and had completed studies of *Limnophila* (Wannan and Waterhouse, 1985) and *Blepharocarya* (Wannan *et al.*, 1985; 1987), much working up of this collection remained to be done, and he was looking forward to an early retirement which would allow him to devote more time to it. It is a source of great satisfaction to his colleagues that, through the good offices of the Office of the Supervising Scientist for the Alligator Rivers Region, money has now been made available so that more can be realized from this important collection of the northern Australian flora.

John considered it his duty to profess botany in the broadest sense; he was always very willing to spend time assisting those who called on his expertise, whether they were students, colleagues or members of the public who so often were directed to his door. He also devoted a great deal of effort over the years to expanding the collection held by the herbarium at the University of New South Wales, which now comprises some 45,000 specimens, and improving the level of its curation. In 1980 he registered the herbarium with the acronym UNSW, and soon afterwards obtained a special development grant from the university to enlarge the accommodation both for the collection and for associated staff and students. This reconstruction was in hand at the time of his death, and it is a suitable acknowledgement of his contribution to the teaching of taxonomy that the enlarged facility was named 'The John T. Waterhouse Herbarium' at the official opening ceremony in June 1983.

In 1973 John was elected a Fellow of the Linnean Society, London, and also became a member of the British Systematics Association. He was a foundation member of both the Australian Systematic Botany Society and a member of the founding committee of the Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney. John T. Waterhouse will be remembered particularly by generations of students from both the University of Sydney and the University of New South Wales as a stimulating teacher of botany, and by the botanical community as a valued colleague with a splendid sense of humour. He will also be remembered for his contributions to monocotyledonous anatomy, the taxonomy of the Myrtaceae and his work on the key to rainforest species of New South Wales. Not only the Society but the Australian botanical community at large is much the poorer for his passing.

Works by John Teast Waterhouse

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